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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the formal means by which Czech distinguishes transitive and intransitive verbs, and specifically the role of the particle "se" in the process usually called "derived intransitivization." "Se" is shown to perform a number of functions which preclude its being called simply an "intransitivizing particle." By way of comparison, a study by Babby is cited which, using Russian data, transformationally introduces the intransitivizing particle "-sja" onto verbs whose object noun phrase has been preposed, deleted, or otherwise vacated. Parallel examples are drawn from Czech illustrating reflexive, passive, and middle voice constructions, and special attention is paid to middle voice forms in Czech which fail to introduce "se." Furthermore, examples of Czech active voice verbs using "se" which take apparent "direct" objects in the accusative case are discussed. The suggestion is made that in some cases there is competition between verbs occurring with the particle "se" and those taking "si" (the enclitic dative reflexive), and specifically that the presence of "se" (like "si") is sometimes felt as merely a modality element, a point of reference, or a means of emphasis. It is concluded that the sources for Czech "se" are more varied than those for Russian "-sja," and the attempt is made to describe some of these other sources. (Author/AM)

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On the Morphology of Transitivity and Intransitivity
in Czech Verbs

One of the areas where English differs markedly from Slavic languages is in the formal means of expressing transitivity and intransitivity in verbs. English verbs are quite versatile to the extent that a single form can often be used in contexts that are quite distinct semantically, as in these sentences:

- (1) John stood in the corner. (intransitive, stative)
 - (2) John stood his skis in the corner. (transitive, causative)
 - (3) John stood in line. (in the sense 'got in line,' intransitive verb of body-position change)
- and (4) John stood when the guests entered. (in the sense 'arose,' another intransitive verb of body-position change, where the motion is vertical [in (3) it was horizontal])

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The fact that Czech would employ a different verb to express each of these four concepts of 'standing' (using the verbs stát, postavít, stoupnout si, and vstát in that order) indicates that Czech has the formal means of expressing certain semantic distinctions that English verbs do not always make. The purpose of this paper will be to point out some of these means.

Many intransitive verbs in Czech occur with the particle se, which historically is an enclitic accusative of the reflexive pronoun, so it is important first of all to discuss the various types of se-verbs in Czech.

Se can express passive voice, as the examples at (1) on the handout show. When the underlying direct object of the active sentences is preposed into subject position after the underlying subject-agent (if one is present in deep structure) has been postposed and marked with the instrumental case (or od + genitive), se appears. Se can also express true reflexivity, as in the sentences at (2). When in these sentences the underlying direct object, being coreferential with the subject, is reflexivized, se appears. A similar situation obtains for reciprocal verbs with se, which are illustrated in (3).

Thus far the appearance of se has been conditioned by vacating a deep structure object noun phrase. In this sense the facts of Czech are in agreement with similar processes which occur in Russian. The Czech particle se corresponds to the Russian affix -sja, and a recent transformational analysis of Russian -sja verbs by L. Babby has suggested that -sja is predictably introduced onto a verb whenever its deep structure object noun phrase is preposed, deleted, or otherwise vacated. Briefly stated, Babby argues that fulfilling the conditions for object vacating is a function of a particular verb's distinct and unpredictable subcategorization feature; that is, a statement in the Lexicon that describes the subject and object arrays that can be used with a particular verb. In the passive sentences discussed a moment ago, the subcategorization feature of the given verb (for example, vyjadřovat in the second pair of sentences) allows the deep structure subject to be vacated by postposing, concomitantly marking it [+ Instr]. The resultant intermediate structure then allows the deep object to be preposed into subject position, and the vacated object slot triggers se-introduction onto the verb. In the

derivation of the reflexive and reciprocal sentences there is neither postposing nor preposing but rather only the deletion of the object noun phrase when reflexivization occurs. Se is again predictably introduced by the Babby Transformation.

Let us now turn our attention to the so-called middle voice, where the facts of Czech present a somewhat different picture. Many verbs permit the option of either filling the underlying subject noun phrase or leaving it unfilled. If it is filled, a subject-agent is present and the result is a normal transitive sentence, as in (4):

Přestěhoval jsem rodinu do nového bytu.
'I moved the family to a new apartment.'

If no overt subject-agent occurs in the underlying sentence, the deep object (rodina) is preposed into subject position, se is introduced, and the result is a middle voice sentence which is non-committal about who actually did the moving:

Rodina se přestěhovala do nového bytu.
'The family moved to a new apartment.'

A similar situation obtains in the second pair of sentences, with se being introduced in the intransitive, middle voice version:

Lékař uzdravil nemocného.
'The doctor cured the sick man.'

Nemocný se uzdravil.
'The sick man recovered (got cured).'

Difficulties arise with the next two pairs of sentences,
however, for the agentless derivative of

Končíme práci v pět hodin.
'We stop work at five o'clock.'

is not the expected *Práce se končí v pět hodin but rather
simply Práce končí v pět hodin 'work stops at five o'clock.'
Likewise, the verb začínat/začít 'begin' makes no formal
distinction between active and middle voices in modern
literary Czech (although analogous forms with se can be
found, they are perceived as archaisms). Czech verbs be-
having this way are of high enough frequency that they de-
serve special treatment, and the allowances that must be
made to describe them do not seriously undermine the analysis
of middle voice se-introduction mentioned earlier. Since
se-introduction cannot operate for these verbs, the subject
noun phrase of a sentence occurring with any of them must
obligatorily be filled at the level of deep structure in order
to block any possible preposing of an object noun phrase and
thereby fulfill the requirements for se-introduction. Therefore,

the subcategorization feature of this small group of verbs must indicate that they always occur with overt subjects at underlying levels, whether or not these subjects are semantic agents, patients, or instruments. This is indeed an anomaly when viewed against the general tendency of Czech formally to distinguish transitive and intransitive verbs, but it is clearly more economical to describe them in terms of an idiosyncratic subcategorization feature than to have to amend and thus weaken the se-introduction transformation (as would be the case if we were to say that for verbs like končit in middle voice sentences, preposing does take place but for some reason se-introduction does not occur).

The examples given in (5) on the handout illustrate a Czech phenomenon that has no parallel in modern literary Russian, and that is the apparent use of a se-verb as a logical and grammatical transitive with a direct object in the accusative case. There is no way of predicting the occurrence of se in these examples using the mechanism discussed earlier if we consider them transitive, and it would therefore be impossible to call the se in these instances an intransitivizing particle since these verbs appear to be

transitive. It is interesting to note, however, that coexisting with the accusative government of these verbs is oblique case government, for example 'učit se + dative.' The dative government here is generally felt by most speakers to be older although not archaic, and perhaps corresponding more to the norms of spisovná čeština than 'učit se + accusative.' If we accept 'učit se + dative' as correct for at least one variety of Czech, its behavior is explainable as a middle voice se-verb like přestěhovat se in (4) on the handout. Here is why: The subcategorization feature of the verb whose stem is uč-i 'teach' allows it to occur with an optionally filled subject node. When the node is filled, as in the sentence

Helena učí žáky angličtině.
'Helen teaches the pupils English.'

we have a normal transitive sentence with an overt agent (Helena). Underlying the middle voice sentence

Žáci se učí angličtině.
'The pupils learn (get taught) English.'

is a deep structure with an empty subject node; the verb uč-i 'teach;' an underlying accusative direct object žáky; and the oblique (dative) secondary object angličtině. The

presence of the empty subject node allows the accusative object to be preposed, giving the agentless sentence Žáci se učí angličtině.

This seems to leave us with something of a contradiction, namely a transitive, active voice sentence Žáci se učí angličtinu (acc) and an intransitive, middle voice sentence Žáci se učí angličtině (dat), both of which we have translated identically: 'The pupils learn English.' There are several ways of explaining this. One is to say that these two sentences never coexist on the same style level in Czech, so they cannot be compared. Assuming that they do coexist in the idiolect of an individual speaker, however, the 'učit se + acc' sentence offers two alternative interpretations. In one reading, the subject of the sentence Žáci se učí angličtinu is felt to be a true agent; that is, the perceived instigator of the action of learning rather than the preposed patient of a middle voice sentence. Thus although the active and middle voice sentences might have identical translations in English, there should be some slight stylistic coloration between them concerning the relationship between subject and verb, namely the impression

that the subject of Žáci se učí angličtinu is a true agent. In this case the se cannot be derived by movement transformation and must be assumed to be a part of the lexical entry for the verb. Alternatively, we can simply acknowledge the possibility that the verb učit 'teach' can have two objects in the accusative case (one direct/animate; one indirect/inanimate), and when the deep structure subject node is not filled, the animate accusative object can be preposed into subject position and se-introduction will be triggered. This will give us a middle voice verb with a secondary accusative object. Although double accusative government such as this is unusual for Slavic, it is well-attested for other Indo-European languages such as Latin.

I would like to mention briefly one further and much less thoroughly investigated use of se in logically transitive but grammatically intransitive sentences, for which several examples have been given at (6) on the handout. This is the so-called 'modal se' which is often associated with the expression of purpose, intensification or heightened involvement on the part of the subject in the action expressed by the verb. These pairs of verbs lend themselves to no easy

classification, and I offer the examples in (6) as illustrations only.

Finally, many verbs in Czech distinguish transitive and intransitive pairs built on similar derivational bases, expressing the familiar stative-causative distinction. A few of these are given in (7). These verbs present no particular problems of description, unlike verbs in se, which I have tried to treat in more detail above and which remain one of the most varied and problematic verb groups in Czech and, indeed, in all of Slavic.

Abstract of Paper

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On the Morphology of Transitivity and Intransitivity
in Czech Verbs

It is the aim of this paper to outline the formal means employed in Czech to distinguish transitive and intransitive verbs, and more specifically to examine the role of the particle se in the process usually called 'derived intransitivization.' It is demonstrated that se performs a number of functions that preclude its being called simply an 'intransitivizing particle' in a synchronic description of Czech.

Chosen as a term of comparison is a recent proposal by Babby, using Russian data, which transformationally introduces the intransitivizing particle -sja onto verbs whose object noun phrase has been preposed, deleted, or otherwise vacated. Parallel examples are drawn from Czech illustra-

ting reflexive, passive, and middle voice constructions, and special attention is paid to middle voice forms in Czech which fail to introduce se. Furthermore, examples of Czech active voice verbs using se which take apparent 'direct' objects in the accusative case are discussed. The suggestion is made that in some cases there is competition between verbs occurring with the particle se and those taking si (the enclitic dative reflexive), and specifically that the presence of se (like si) is sometimes felt as merely a modality element, a point of reference, or a means of emphasis. It is concluded that the sources for Czech se are more varied than those for Russian -sja, and the attempt is made to describe some of these other sources.

Reading time: 15 minutes
A handout with all examples,
translated into English, is
supplied.

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1. Passive se

Věc se rozhodne v nejbližších dnech.

Úsměv vyjadřuje radost.
Radost se vyjadřuje úsměvem.

Koupí se maso a udělají se řízky.

The matter will be decided in the next few days.

A smile expresses pleasure.
Pleasure is expressed by a smile.

Meat will be bought and cutlets will be made.

2. Reflexive se

Helena se ráno myje.
V zimě se musíš teple oblékat.

Připravujte se na nejhorší.

Helena washes (herself) in the morning.
In winter you must dress (yourself) warmly.

Prepare (yourself) for the worst.

3. Reciprocal se

Už jsme se seznámili.

Radili se o dalším postupu.

Sejdeme se ve středu třetího.

We've already gotten acquainted (with each other).

They conferred (with each other) about further progress.

Let's meet on Wednesday the third.

4. Active Voice vs. Middle Voice

Přestěhoval jsem rodinu do nového bytu.
Rodina se přestěhovala do nového bytu.

Lékař uzdravil nemocného.
Nemocný se uzdravil.

Končíme práci v pět hodin.
Práce končí v pět hodin.

Předseda začal schůzi.
Schůze začala.

I moved the family to a new apartment.

The family moved to a new apartment.

The doctor cured the sick man.
The sick man recovered.

We stop work at five o'clock.
Work stops at five o'clock.

The chairman began the meeting.
The meeting began.

5. Se with accusative

Jiří se učí angličtinu.
Dozvěděli jsme se brzy výsledky zkoušek.

Nebude nám těžko se domyslit ostatní otázky.

George studies English.

We quickly found out the results of the examinations:

It won't be difficult for us to infer the remaining questions.

6. Se expressing modality or intensity

dožadovat úřad o povolení	petition authorities for permission
dožadovat se schválení	clamor for approval
chapat někoho za rukav	pull someone by the sleeve
chapat podstatu věci	grasp the basis of a matter
chapat se zloděje	catch a thief
chapat se oteží	grab the reins
chapat se příležitosti	seize an opportunity
držet opratě, květiny, dítě	hold the reins, flowers, a child
držet se zábradlí, něčí ruky	cling to a railing, someone's hand
držet se zásad, zákonů	adhere to principles, laws

7. Statives vs. causatives

viset (be hanging)	- věšet (věsit)/pověsit (cause to hang)
stát (be standing)	- stavět/postavit
sedět (be sitting)	- usazovat/usadit
ležet (be lying)	- klást/položit